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SUBJECT: VIETNAM: CHILD MARRIAGE

REF: STATE 36341

1. The legal age for marriage in Vietnam, according to the Law on Marriage and Family, is 20 for men and 18 for women. There is no lower legal age for marriage even with parental consent. In practice, most marriages in urban areas conform to the national law; however, in rural areas, underage couples may live together in a "marriage" accepted by the community, but not recognized officially.

2. Underage marriage is not a significant problem, but the practice persists among ethnic groups and in poor rural communities. Forced marriage is a related problem where parents in some rural areas believe they have the right to choose a suitable spouse for their child. None of the government offices or NGOs contacted by Post was able to provide statistics on child marriage.

3. Post is unaware of any U.S.-funded initiatives to reduce the incidence of or to address possible negative affects of child marriage. The Government of Vietnam recognizes the adverse conditions relating to underage marriage, such as lack of education and awareness, reproductive health issues and psychological immaturity. The Commission for Population, Family and Children sponsors Information, Education and Communication Campaigns (IECC) in rural areas. The Commission is initiating a new three-year project aimed at reducing the incidence of underage marriage in the northern mountain provinces. Currently this issue is approached most often in terms of legal awareness programs. The 1999 Inter-agency Resolution Number 9, by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ethics Affairs Committee and the Peasants Association, develops programs which educate the rural population about the laws and provide legal aid and training. The Vietnam Women's Union and the Youth Union also sponsor programs targeting young people for education on legal affairs and pre-marriage issues.

BOARDMAN